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ISLAMIC REVIVALISM AND CHANGE IN SAUDI ARABIA: JUHAYMĀN AL-ᶜUTAYBĪ'S "LETTERS" TO THE SAUDI PEOPLE*

Introduction

Islamic "fundamentalism" continues to fascinate observers of Middle Eastern societies who find themselves at a loss to understand and explain the myriad religious movements in contemporary affairs.[1] A successful attempt, classifying many religious movements throughout the Muslim world, remains the exception.[2] Other studies have examined specific movements active in one or more countries. The most notable case is that of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt and Syria, which has received careful attention.[3] More recently, special attention has been devoted to the dramatic changes under way in Revolutionary Iran.[4] Religious movements in other parts of the Muslim world have also received careful scrutiny, although it is still difficult, in the absence of documentation, to ascertain conclusively what specific demands these individual groups may be making.

In Saudi Arabia, important religious movements re-entered the political scene in 1979. First, Juhaymān b. Muḥmmad b. Sayf al-ᶜUtaybī, along with Muḥammad b. ᶜAbdallah al-Qaḥṭānī and several hundred supporters, seized the Grand Mosque in Makka on 20 November 1979 and called on the Saudi ulama to withdraw their allegiance to the Āl Saᶜūd royal family.[5] Second, Shiᶜa riots in the King-

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[1] For a few examples, see Daniel Pipes, *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), and J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (New York: Basic Books, 1980). For concise analyses of change in the Muslim world, see "Muslim Modernists: The Torch-Bearers of Progressive Islam," *IS*, XXXI (1987), 194-204; Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Muslim Revivalist Thought in the Arab World: An Overview," *MW*, LXXVI (1986), 143-67; and M.E. Yapp, "Contemporary Islamic Revivalism," *Asian Affairs*, XI (1980), 178-95.

[2] R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985).

[3] R.P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford Univesity Press, 1969); see also Olivier Carré and Gérard Michaud, *Les Frères Musulmans (1928-1982)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), and Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[4] Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); see also Nikki R. Keddie and Eric Hooglund, *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

[5] Nazih N.M. Ayubi, "The Politics of Militant Islamic Movements in the Middle East," *Journal of International Affairs*, XXXVI (Fall/Winter 1982/1983), 271-83, especially, 274-76.

dom's oil producing Eastern Province disrupted public order in December 1979 and January 1980. But, on 5 December 1979, the Holy Ḥaram was back under the control of Saudi authorities, whose use of force to defeat the "rebels" was sanctioned by a *fatwā* issued on 24 November by the same ulama.[6] Al-ʿUtaybī's call for puritan behavior was reminiscent of the Ikhwān who had cooperated with King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Saʿūd (1880-1953). Juhaymān the Najdī was unmistakably rejecting the fast-paced modernization program instituted throughout the Kingdom in the period since 1932, and the "incident illustrated in a dramatic way the existence of various religious discontents hidden beneath the surface stability and wealth of Saudi society."[7]

In a series of "Rasā'il" (Letters or Epistles), al-ʿUtaybī associated the Kingdom's social, economic, religious and even political disorders with the modern pace of change, and with the historical alliance between the Saʿūd family and religious authorities: Al-ʿUtaybī opposed the 1744 religio-political alliance between Muḥmmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and Muḥmmad b. Saʿūd.

A systematic examination of al-ʿUtaybī's writings, which cover a broad range of subjects in 190 book-length pages, is revealing.[8] Of special interest is the question of the relationship between the ulama and the monarchy's claim to legitimacy, as perceived by this young Saudi iconoclast.[9] Whether al-ʿUtaybī was a dangerous person or carried a bad (or good) omen for Saudi Arabia is less relevant, but identifying the causes which led this individual to become an iconoclast is crucial, because of their possible consequences for the monarchy. It is impossible to know whether other "Juhaymāns" are active in Saudi Arabia. It is possible, however, to identify those trends which led Juhaymān to launch his movement and which generated the support it received from at least several thousand persons in Makka and, shortly after, in the Qaṭīf region in the Eastern Province. By all accounts, "these Sunni and Shiʿa insurrections reflect[ed] the ideological and social cleavages in a society increasingly suffering from the culture shock of haphazard and rapid modernization."[10] These anti-Saʿūd eruptions, which truly shocked the ruling family, had their origins in the turbulent and often violent genesis of the Saudi state in the late 1920s.

Saudi Arabia: Political Process 1932-1979

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is not an anachronism.[11] Except for a brief period of political instability in the late 1950s and early 1960s, public support to the

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[6] Joseph A. Kechichian, "The Role of the ʿUlama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *IJMES*, XVIII (1986), 53-71.

[7] William Ochsenwald, "Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival," *IJMES*, XIII (1981), 276.

[8] Juhaymān b. Muḥammad b. Sayf al-ʿUtaybī, *Sabʿ Rasā'il* [Printed Manuscript] (n.p., n.d).

[9] Opposition or war against internal enemies in Islam may be classified as "just" since apostates (ahl al-ridda) or rebels (ahl al-baghī) can justify their actions ideologically (thus avoiding a fixed legal penalty) "based upon a divergent interpretation (ta'wīl) of God's Word." For a discussion see Joel L. Kraemer, "Apostates, Rebels and Brigands," *Israel Oriental Studies*, X (1980), 34-73.

[10] Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, p. 137; see also Ayubi, *Journal of International Affairs*, XXXVI (1982-83), 174-76, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shaykh, Ṣāliḥ al-Dakhil and ʿAdb Allāh al-Zayr, *Intifādat al-Minṭeqa al-Sharqiyya* (London: Munaẓẓamat al-Thawra al-Islāmiyya fī al-Jazīrat al-ʿArabiyya 1981), pp. 29-34.

[11] David G. Edens, "The Anatomy of the Saudi Revolution," *IJMES*, V (1974), 50-64.

House of Saʿūd has provided the ruling family both legitimacy and relative political stability. Opposition to the 1744 alliance has remained isolated even when it occurred. Will this situation persist through the 1990s, given the Kingdom's socio-economic and political problems?

Recent events make it abundantly clear that the country's rulers can no longer overlook waste and extravagance. With reduced oil revenues and an increasingly sophisticated population, state expenditures must now be justified in economic terms. With limited room for political expression, religious life remains an open avenue for dissent. Ironically, any kind of laxity in social and religious affairs may have negative repercussions on Saudi political life since optimal maneuvering is institutionally restricted. The king can use his persuasive capabilities, but he must weigh any actions against his tribal and religious responsibilities. The concept of *maṣlaḥa* (public interest) must be balanced with *taʿāwun* (cooperation) under religious supervision and blessings.

Between 1932, when ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz unified the tribes of the four provinces that make Saudi Arabia (Najd, Ḥijāz, ʿAsīr, Ḥasā), and 1953, when Ibn Saʿūd acceded to the throne, the ruling elite cemented its hold on political affairs via the Sharīʿa. While governing in tandem with the ulama, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz instituted the popular oath of allegiance (bayʿa) which, through a consultative council (majlis al-shūrā) and a council of elders (majlis al-khāṣṣ), institutionalized the monarchy's political source of power. The king further strengthened his position by devising an elaborate tribally-based system of consultation with leading members of the high committee *(al-lajnat al-ʿulyā)*, ulama and key merchants *(tujjār)*. This genuine system of consultation was galvanized by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's charismatic personality. Indeed, the king's accomplishments were largely the result of his persuasive capacities and his successful balancing skills among tribal leaders, religious authorities and influential merchants. The ulama, however, received the king's special attention. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz made every effort to seek their advice at daily meetings, realizing how vital that support was as a legitimizing tool.[12]

The importance of that support would be masterfully exhibited in 1964 when Prince Fayṣal succeeded his brother Saʿūd to the throne.[13] "Nationalist" and "anti-imperialist" slogans gained in popularity in 1953 and 1956 when ARAMCO workers initiated strikes to gain better wages. Egyptian revolutionary zeal and the Palestinian cause gained followers who perceived the monarchy in Riyāḍ to be opposing "Arab nationalism." This sentiment was considerably fueled

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[12] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz saw an ulama delegation every day after sunset prayers. The practice was reduced to a weekly meeting under King Khālid (for health reasons?), see Fu'ād Ḥamzah, *Al-Bilād al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya* (Makka: Maṭbaʿat Umm al-Qurā, 1937), pp. 90–91; see also James Buchan, "Secular and Religious Opposition in Saudi Arabia," in Tim Niblock, ed., *State, Society and Economy in Saudi Arabia* (London and Exeter: Croom Helm and Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, 1982), p. 108 [Hereafter referred to as Buchan 1982].

[13] King Saʿūd's shortcomings in his leadership qualities prompted his ouster from power in 1964, after a consensus was reached between senior members of the Saʿūd family and the ulama; see Farouk A. Sankari, "Islam and Politics in Saudi Arabia," in Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, ed., *Islamic Resurgence in the Arab World* (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 185–88; see also "Transfer of Powers from HM King Saud to HRH Amir Faysal," *MEJ*, XVIII (1964), 351–54. For a more critical evaluation, see Alexander Bligh, *From Prince to King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), pp. 56–83.

by the U.S. lease of the Dhahran Air Base and King Sa^cūd's acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine.[14] Arab nationalism would eventually lead a group of princes and educated commoners in June 1960 to call for major constitutional reforms. With King Saʿūd extending support to the young princes, several were brought into the government at Viceroy Fayṣal's expense. With successive failures in the Kingdom's economic affairs and major foreign policy blunders in the Yemen and Egypt, Fayṣal demanded and received *carte blanche* from the ruling elite to form a new government; King Saʿūd's abdication followed. Although this move may have saved Saudi Arabia from political chaos, it must be emphasized that Fayṣal's source of support among the ulama was largely used to protect the status quo at the expense of the young princes, whose pro-Arab sentiments fell outside the ruling elite's political and religious agendas. But to his credit, King Fayṣal fell back on Islamic legitimacy at home, and encouraged pan-Islamic movements abroad.[15] By 1973, King Fayṣal would become the Arab national leader par excellence, without threatening Saudi Arabia's domestic body politic. At the time, however, the ulama evaluated the young princes' actions and concluded that they were too "secular" in nature. It is this unique pragmatic aspect of religious/political maṣlaḥa which has maintained the ruling elite in power.

Religious opposition in Saudi Arabia might, on the surface, appear contradictory because strict Ḥanbalī/Wahhābī observances strive for puritanism. It is not because Ḥanbalī scholars have failed to support heterodox doctrines and practices, which were not exclusively based on revealed texts. For example, Ibn al-Jawzī was concerned with the abuses of "philosophers, pagans, theologians, traditionalists, popular preachers, philologists, poets, Sufis, the common people, and the rich."[16] Ibn Taymiyya admired the works of Sufi writers like al-Junayd, Sahl al-Tustarī, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, Abū Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Abū Ḥafṣ al-Suhrawardī, and ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.[17] And Ibn Qudāwa was equally praiseworthy of Sufi *ijtihād.*[18] Thus, even among Sunnis, there were (and are) clear differences in religious practices of which the admiration of heterodox (mainly Sufi) methods is but one example. Sunnis following the movement of *al-Daʿwa ilā al-tawḥīd* (the call to the doctrine of the Oneness of God, or Wahhābism) must surely anticipate schisms despite puritanical restrictions. This is particularly the case because the Ḥanbalī heritage, whose theological interpretations form a bedrock for the tawḥīd legal framework, has most strongly shielded ijtihād.[19]

As threatening as these Sunni challenges were, the Āl Saʿūd faced an equally powerful political/religious opposition among the Shiʿa minority population in the Ḥasā Province. Inspired by the Iranian Revolution and the Makka uprising, Saudi

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[14] While the Eisenhower Doctrine was intended to contain communism in the Middle East, Arab nationalists led by Nasser perceived the Doctrine as anti-Arab.

[15] James P. Piscatori, "The Roles of Islam in Saudi Arabia's Political Development," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980), p. 135.

[16] George Makdisi, "Hanbalite Islam," in Merlin L. Swartz, ed., *Studies on Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 249.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. 250.

[19] Henri Laoust, *Les Schismes dans l'Islam* (Paris: Payot, 1965, 1983), pp. 114-18 and 266-76.

Shiʿa expressed their grievances by organizing large demonstrations which Riyāḍ suppressed.[20]

The Saudi Shiʿa number between 250,000 and 400,000 and are mainly in the cities of Qaṭīf, Hufūf, Sayhāt and al-Ḥasā itself in the Eastern Province. A majority of them work in the oil industry and are essential. En masse deportations of Saudi Shiʿa accused of anti-state activities would be harmful to the oil industry. Unlike the Shiʿa in Bahrain, their alienation from the ruling elite is less economic in nature than deeply felt religious and ideological alienation. Estranged from religious life in Saudi Arabia, the Shiʿa of Ḥasā turn to Iraq and Iran for spiritual guidance and value the teachings emanating from the ulama and mujtahids in Karbalā, Najaf and Qum. Rejection of the Shiʿa practices in Saudi Arabia is a matter of historic debate, but there is little doubt that opposition to the Shiʿa on religious grounds (e.g., are they true Muslims?) has embittered many over the years.[21] In fact, the Shiʿa were "persuaded" time and again to refrain from holding ceremonies at ʿĀshūrāʾ. The mourning procession on 10 Muḥarram for the Imām Ḥusayn, an emotional gathering, has on many occasions led to sectarian violence in Muslim countries. Historically, the Ibn Jiluwi governors of Ḥasā refused the Shiʿa community permission to stage ʿĀshūrāʾ "celebrations," and it can be argued, albeit only from a political point of view, that this was for their own good. Yet, Saudi Shiʿa in Qaṭīf, energized by the revolutionary fervor emanating from Iran, announced that they would stage the ʿĀshūrāʾ ceremony in 1979. On 28 November 1979, coinciding with the Makka Mosque takeover by Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī and his followers, ʿĀshūrāʾ demonstrations were in fact under way in the streets of Sayhāt and Qaṭīf.[22] As is often the case in such instances, the confrontation between demonstrators and security forces led to bloody clashes. Seventeen Shiʿa lost their lives in the first 24 hours of rioting. Prince Aḥmad, the Deputy Interior Minister, made an attempt to mediate; but promises made in November 1979 were broken by 1 February 1980: violence broke out again in Qaṭīf when four Shiʿa demonstrating on the anniversary of Imām Khumaynī's triumphant return to Iran, lost their lives.[23]

Since 1980, Saudi authorities have gone out of their way to "manage" Shiʿa opposition in the Eastern Province. In addition to a generous inflow of financial support in the region, where public works projects have been authorized in record time, several members of the royal family, including King Khālid and King Fahd visited with local dignitaries to consult on issues of common concern. The major roadblock facing both sides remained the repercussion of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Although arguable, Shiʿa discontent in the Kingdom depended more on Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran and the reverberations of the Iran-Iraq War.

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[20] ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Amr, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya fī al-Jazīra al-ʿArabīyya* (London: Munaẓẓamat al-Thawra al-Islāmiyya fī al-Jazīra al-ʿArabīyya, 1406H); see also James Dorsy, "Saudi minority sect is restive," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 February 1980.

[21] Martin Kramer, "Tragedy in Mecca," *Orbis*, XXXII (Spring 1988), 232–33.

[22] This may not have been a pure coincidence since there are clear references in Juhaymān's writings to Shīʿa grievances and activities; see, for example, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shaykh *Intifādat*, pp. 207–08.

[23] A. Arafī, *Ḥattā Maṭlaʿ al-Fajr* (London: Munaẓẓamat al-Thawra al-Islāmiyya fī al-Jazīra al-ʿArabīyya, 1984). Published by the Organization of the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (OIRAP), this graphic book highlights the extent of the demonstrations and the level of suppression.

Indeed an outright Iranian victory in the Gulf War, coupled with a Shiʿa government in Baghdad, would have further galvanized the Saudi Shiʿa to press for more political reforms and greater freedom in religious practices. Equally significant were the potential inroads that a rejuvenated Shiʿa community in Saudi Arabia could make in the power base of the ruling elite. The 1988 Iran-Iraq War cease-fire on the other hand, which was interpreted in Teheran as a temporary setback for the Iranian Revolution, strengthened Riyāḍ's hand. Under the circumstances, how did the "establishment" ulama react to greater Shiʿa assertiveness? Has the increased Shiʿa religious expression sat well with the Sunni anti-establishment movements?

It is difficult to answer these questions since no conclusive evidence is available to suggest that religious schisms have made any gains in the political arena. Thus, Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī's actions in 1979 and the Shiʿa uprising in the Eastern Province must be analyzed in terms of (a) the threat to the religious-political "balance" holding the ruling elite together, and (b) the precarious Sunni-Shiʿa balance of tolerance.

The Attack on the Holy Kaʿba[24]

On 20 November 1979, the first day of Hijra year 1400, as the Imām of the Grand Mosque, al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. Sabīl, was preparing to lead this most special of dawn prayers, Juhaymān b. Muḥammad b. Sayf al-ʿUtaybī fired several shots and allegedly "beseeched the approximately fifty thousand assembled worshippers" to recognize his brother-in-law, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qaḥṭānī, as the expected Mahdī.[25]

Al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. Sabīl escaped by retreating to the Kaʿba's public telephone room to summon assistance. While the attack on the Kaʿba started around 5:30 in the morning, and while the Shaykh is reported to have called the authorities soon afterwards, it was not until three hours later and after a second telephone call at 8:30 that the perimeter of the mosque was secured. Three hours was ample time for the rebels to entrench themselves in the mosque by closing its gates and "organizing" their defenses. As a public place of worship, and hence open to all pilgrims, the mosque was one of the most "vulnerable" public places in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was not surprising therefore that large quantities of ammunition were brought inside the mosque with relative ease. According to assistant deputy commander of the National Guard, al-Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Tuwayjry, "Juhaymān's weapons came directly from the stores of the National Guard and were driven into the mosque in convoys of National Guard trucks."[26] Clearly, this was more than religious fanaticism at work. It was indeed a serious political challenge to the Āl-Saʿūd rule.

For the following two weeks, Saudi authorities used every available means to regain control of the Kaʿba.[27] Initial frontal military assaults failed, given the stra-

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[24] The author dealt with the same events in his earlier mentioned article in *IJMES*, XVIII (1986), 58–60. See also Wilhelm Dietl, *Holy War* (New York: MacMillan, 1984), pp. 211–27.

[25] Sandra Mackey, *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1987), p. 230; see also ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Ibrāhīm Matanī, *Jarīmat al-ʿAṣr: Qiṣṣat Iḥtilāl al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* (Cairo: Dār Al-Anṣār, 1980).

[26] Mackey, *The Saudi's*, p. 231.

tegic strength of the rebels (protected by the imposing buildings) and the self-imposed restraint exercised by the armed forces. The attack was not on a "hill" which one could conquer in a few hours. In addition to innocent pilgrims present inside the Kaᶜba (in effect hostages), and the sacredness of the structure, Saudi authorities had to consider the final shape of the mosque after the attack. How would they present the Holy Mosque to the rest of the Muslim world? How successful would they be in their "protective" duties? How much force could they use to regain physical control of the premises? For the better part of the first week, while consolidating their political and religious positions, the Āl Saᶜūd limited the use of force. But as soon as they gained public support, both inside the Kingdom and in the majority of the Muslim world, the Āl Saᶜūd shed their reluctance to act decisively. Although difficult to ascertain, the initial reluctance probably reflected internal military schisms as well. In fact, Riyāḍ dispatched several National Guard infantry battalions to storm the mosque. Once these battalions were ordered to open fire, an undetermined number of officers and soldiers refused to participate. Indeed, some may have even helped rebel groups to flee. Others may have provided the rebels with "hundreds of boxes containing ammunition and medium machineguns, as well as masks to counter poisonous gas or to use against tear gas, in addition to food and medical supplies."[28] When the authorities learned of such assistance, they withdrew the National Guard battalions, replacing them with army units. Inexperienced in anti-terrorist maneuvers, the army proved even less capable.[29] When it became apparent that it was unable to quell the rioting, Riyāḍ called on France for technical advice and support. Paris rushed several GIGN (Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale) officers who recommended the use of deadly nerve gas to get the rebels out of the vaulted cellars. Riyāḍ hesitated, but with mounting casualties among Saudi soldiers engaged in a futile assault on the Kaᶜba, accepted the French advice. Despite the use of nerve gas, it was not until 5 December 1979 that al-ᶜUtaybī and his followers surrendered. Many were killed in hand-to-hand combat inside the cellars of the mosque. When the others emerged two weeks later, they were paraded in front of television cameras as "desecrators" and "beasts."

What had occurred in Makka was not just an incident. It was related not only to disturbances in the Eastern Province of the Kingdom led by impoverished Shiᶜa, but it was a blow to the prestige of the House of Saᶜūd. Understandably, the royal authorities mounted a major campaign to discredit al-ᶜUtaybī and his message. Having desecrated the Holy Kaᶜba, few Muslims could sympathize with al-ᶜUtaybī. Few did. His much publicized behavior, especially with respect to the use of weapons in the holiest site in Islam, the Kaᶜba, was widely reported so as to further discredit him and his actions. Yet, the ruling elite had to come to grips with al-ᶜUtaybī's message, which had been well known to both religious authorities and internal security forces for several years.

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[27] Fahd al-Qaḥṭānī, *Zilzāl Juhaymān fi Makka* (London: Munaẓẓamat al-Thawra al-Islamiyya fī al-ᶜArabīyya, 1987), pp. 171–210.

[28] "The Army is Capable of Toppling the Saudi Dynasty," *Makka Calling*, No. 38 (January 1987), pp. 22–23.

[29] *Intifāḍat al-Ḥaram 1400H-1979* (London: Munaẓẓamat al-Thawra al-Islāmiyya fī al-Jazīra al-ᶜArabiyya 1981), pp. 51–70.

Al-ʿUtaybī's message can be best understood in the historical context which led to the unification of the Arabian Peninsula. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Saʿūd and the ulama were the political and religious poles, respectively, of the original triad which succeeded in its endeavors. At the time, the ruler conceded that his contemplated unification of tribal territory could not be accomplished without the support of the Ikhwān, whose settlements throughout the Peninsula played a crucial role in the ascendancy of "Saudi" power. The 'ulama' could bless the alliance and the king could win allegiance through such intricate measures as inter-marriage, but he still needed the muscle to overcome pockets of resistance to his overall political design. This he could only accomplish with devoted soldiers like the Ikhwān. In return for their unique services, the Ikhwān expected their influence to persist in the Kingdom for a long period of time.[30]

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's relatively tolerant and politically astute administration would obstruct the puritanical approach of the Ikhwān. The clash between the two parties would last several years and only in the mid-1930s did the king triumph. It is critical to note that the original Ikhwān, who portrayed themselves as the defenders of the true faith and supporters of the Sharīʿa, were not only opposed to the king's "modern" ideas.[31] In addition to their opposition to innovative steps, including wireless telegraphy and automobiles, the Ikhwān were fighting for their political life. For them, the alliance was a triad; for the Saʿūds and the ulama, it was only bipolar. The Ikhwān wanted protection for their tribal institutions and feared the erosion of their power-base. Later developments forced many Ikhwān settlements to relinquish their independence and assimilate to the Kingdom's newly devised tribal hierarchies. The alternative was total defeat. Al-ʿUtaybī was fighting to restore the Ikhwān's position in the country's polity. This is not to underestimate the practical differences between a king with "stately" objectives and religious zealots whose goals were limited to protecting their fiefs. It is a matter of record that many Ikhwān leaders and skeptical ulama were eventually persuaded to accept ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's practical innovations for Saudi Arabia. It was "demonstrated" to them that such means as radio and television could indeed defend the true faith and support the Sharīʿa when used for the transmission of prayers. Consequently, the clash between the ruling elite and the Ikhwān concerned nothing less than the future distribution of power.[32]

Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī emulated the Ikhwān's behavior and attire by wearing a shin-length robe and advocating simple, almost primitive, social changes. He castigated television and photography, as his ancestors had opposed wireless telegraphy. He opposed modern gadgets and trends and longed for simpler choices. Yet his adept use of "modern" weapons (including machine-guns) cannot simply be labeled an expediency. The Ikhwān had always used rifles and other weapons and such uses were almost always justified in religious terms (i.e., in the defense of the faith and religious practices). Al-ʿUtaybī and his followers, however, were not

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[30] John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910–1930* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 25–44 and 105–55; see also Alois Musil, *Northern Negd: A Topographical Inquiry* (New York: American Geographical Society. Oriental Explorations and Studies, No. 5, 1928), pp. 256–303.

[31] Edens, *IJMES*, V (1974), 58–59.

[32] Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors*, pp. 156–61.

engaged in a territorial conflict. They were not "converting" anyone to their true cause and were certainly not engaged in the peaceful pursuit of territory with specific boundaries to practice their faith. Their message was one of opposition to the House of Saʿūd and the ruling elite's alliance system, as well as the proclamation of the long-awaited Mahdi. The antipathy towards the Saʿūd family may have also included elements of tribal revenge. Al-ʿUtaybī's grandfather, Ibn Ḥumayd Sulṭān b. Bijād, was killed at Sabila in 1929 in a battle that confronted "wiry cousins from Najd."[33] But surely, the use of modern means of violence was not going to rally frightened believers – many of whom lost their lives inside the Kaʿba on the first day of Hijra 1400 – to flock to al-Qahṭānī either for religious or tribal reasons. Yet, al-ʿUtaybī and al-Qahṭānī were defending the blemished honor of the Ikhwān. Their opposition to the ruling elite, ostensibly presented in religious terminology, was political in nature. Nowhere is this more apparent than in al-ʿUtaybī's own writings.

Al-ʿUtaybī's "Letters"

There are at least four references to al-ʿUtaybī's letters and there are differences as to the number of pamphlets and their authorship.

Buchan

In his chapter titled "The Return of the Ikhwan – 1979," James Buchan quotes from two undated pamphlets attributed to al-ʿUtaybī,[34] namely,

Pamphlet 1: "Rules of Allegiance and Obedience: The Misconduct of Rulers," and

Pamphlet 3: "The Call of the Brethren."[35]

In 1982, Buchan wrote that Juhaymān's preachings were "found in four pamphlets, signed by him . . . and were almost certainly designed as texts for exegesis rather than as manifestos."[36]

Al-Yassini

Ayman Al-Yassini, in his *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, states that "seven pamphlets are known to have been written by Juhaymān,"[37] even

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[33] Ibid., p. 140; see also Musil, *Northern Negd*, pp. 283-86 and 289-90, and Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, p. 138. Dekmejian reasoned: "In the battle of Sabila (1929), ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz finally defeated the Ikhwān led by Fayṣal al-Dawish and Ibn Ḥumayd Sulṭān b. Bijād, the leaders of the Mutayr and ʿUtayba tribes respectively. It was no coincidence that these tribes were well represented among the rebels who occupied the Grand Mosque in November 1979."

[34] James Buchan, "The Return of the Ikhwan-1979," in David Holden and Richard Johns, *The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), pp. 511-26.

[35] Buchan fails to note whether these pamphlets are in Arabic or English. There are no page numbers to the three references in his text, and no information on a possible pamphlet number 2.

[36] In this instance, only the title of the first pamphlet is made available; see Buchan 1982, pp. 121-22. Buchan says here that Pamphlet Number 1 was "probably published early in 1978."

[37] Ayman Al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1985), p. 125.

though eight titles (along with page numbers) are listed in the book's footnotes.[38]

Ahmad

In his *Rasā'il Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī*, the Egyptian writer Rifʿat Sayyid Aḥmad, assembled eleven letters, divided in two groups of four and seven documents respectively, attributed to al-ʿUtaybī.[39] The titles of the letters in Aḥmad are:

Group I: Arbaʿ Rasā'il fī al-Imāra wa'l-Tawḥīd wa'l-Naṣīḥa wa'l-Mīzān
Letter 1: Al-Imāra wa'l-Bayʿa wa'l-Ṭāʿa wa-Kashf Talbīs al-Ḥukkām ʿalā Ṭalabat al-ʿIlm wa'l-ʿulūm – 44 pages.
Letter 2: Al-Tawḥīd – 44 pages.
Letter 3: Al-Naṣīḥa – 13 pages.
Letter 4: Al-Mīzān li Ḥayāt al-Insān – 32 pages.
Group II: Sabʿ Rasā'il
Letter 1: al-Fitan wa Akhbār al-Mahdī wa Nuzūl ʿIsā ʿAlayhi al-Salām wa Ashrāṭ al-Sāʿa – 42 pages.
Letter 2: Bayān al-Shirk wa Khaṭarihi – 27 pages.
Letter 3: al-Fiṭra al-Salīma – 17 pages.
Letter 4: Awthaq ʿurā al-Imān: al-Ḥubb fī Allāh wa'l-Bughḍ fī Allāh – 23 pages.
Letter 5: Madākhil al-Shayṭān li Ifsād al-Qulūb – 26 pages.
Letter 6: Ikhtiṣār Risālat al-Amr bi'l-Maʿrūf wa'l-Nahī ʿan al-Munkar li Ibn Taymiyya – 37 pages.
Letter 7: Al-Bayān wa'l-Tafṣīl fī Wujūb Maʿrifat al-Dalīl – 53 pages.

The seven letters here are followed by excerpts from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Ḥusaynī Al-Jazā'irī, with al-ʿUtaybī's commentary. Finally, the Aḥmad volume closes with al-ʿUtaybī's "Call."

Printed Manuscript

Al-ʿUtaybī's "Seven Letters" manuscript is based on a photocopy of a 190 page document with no publisher and no date.[40] The table of contents and individual pamphlets are numbered 1 to 7 and are titled:

Letter 1: al-Fitan wa Akhbār al-Mahdī wa'l-Dajjāl wa nuzūl ʿIsā ʿAlayhi al-Salām wa Ashrāṭ al-Sāʿa – 29 pages (Signed Juhaymān b. Muḥammad b. Sayf al-ʿUtaybī).

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[38] Ibid., p. 151. The titles of the pamphlets cited (in Al-Yassini's Translation) are:
Pamphlet 1: Al Imara wa al-Bayia wa Kashf Talbis al-Huk[k]am ala talabat al Ilm wa al-Awam—37 pages.
Pamphlet 2: Da'wat al-Ikhwan, Kayfa Bada'at Wa Ila Aya[sic]-Tasir—36 pages.
Pamphlet 3: al-Mizan li-Hayat al-Insan—27 pages.
Pamphlet 4: Mukhtasar al-Hasana li-Ibn Taymiyah—29 pages.
Pamphlet 5: Rafʿ al-Iltibas An Milat man Jaʿlahu Al-Lah Imam al-Nas—20 pages.
Pamphlet 6: Mukhtasar al-Amr bi al-Maʿrouf wa al-Nahi an al-Munkar—34 pages.
Pamphlet 7: al-Fitan wa Akhbar al-Mahdi al-Dajal—30 pages.
Pamphlet 8: al-Fitra al-Salima—10 pages.

[39] Rifʿat Sayyid Aḥmad, ed., *Rasā'il Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī: Qā'id al-Muqtaḥimīn li'l-Masjid al-Ḥarām bi-Makkah* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūla, 1988).

[40] al-ʿUtaybī, *Rasā'il*, pp. 1–190.

Letter 2: Bayān al-shirk wa Khaṭarihi – 17 pages (Signed Aḥad Ṭalabat al-Muʿallim).
Letter 3: al-Fiṭra al-Salīma – 12 page (signed Juhaymān b. Muḥammad b. Sayf al-ʿUtaybī).
Letter 4: Awthaq ʿurā al-Imān: al-Ḥubb fī Allāh Wa'l-Bughd fī Allāh – 14 pages (signed Ḥasan b. Muḥsin al-Wahidi).
Letter 5: Madākhil al-Shayṭān li Ifsād al-Qulūb – 17 pages (signed Aḥad Ṭalabat al-Muʿallim).
Letter 6: Ikhtiṣār Risālat al-Amr bi'l-Maʿrūf wa'l-Nahī ʿan al-Munkar li Ibn Taymiyya – 25 pages (signed Juhaymān b. Muḥammad b. Sayf al-ʿUtaybī).
Letter 7: Al-Bayān wa'l-Tafṣīl fī Wujūb Maʿrifat al-Dalīl – 33 pages (signed by Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qahṭānī).

Like the Aḥmad documents, these "Seven Letters" are followed by excerpts from ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Ḥusaynī al-Jazā'irī, followed by al-ʿUtaybī's commentary. The last three pages of the document contain al-ʿUtaybī's call titled "Hādhihi Hiya Daʿwatunā" [This is our Call].[41] Al-ʿUtaybī is the signed author of letters numbers 1, 3, and 6 in the undated manuscript. His co-leader, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah al-Qahṭānī, is the author of letter number 7. Ḥasan b. Muḥsin al-Waḥidī authored letter number 4, while letters numbers 2 and 5 are attributed to a "student of the teacher." Of the four sets of documents, the last is the only one with signatures identifying different authors.

It is impossible to verify the authenticity of any of these letters, especially when rumors persist that Juhaymān was illiterate. Whether a wealthy young sympathizer from an established merchant family in Jidda, Yūsuf b. Junayd, supported al-ʿUtaybī financially in Riyāḍh after joining the group and authoring the pamphlets, is a matter of speculation.[42]

Yet it is hard to believe that a motivated young Corporal, serving in the National Guard since the 1960s (Juhaymān received a discharge from the Guard sometime in 1973), and a student at the University of Madina (Department of Religious Studies) between 1972 and 1974, would be illiterate.[43] The available documents, at any rate, are written in fluent classical Arabic, indicating that the author or authors of the "Seven Letters" were deeply immersed in the Arabic language and in Sunni tradition. Frequent and accurate references to the Qur'ān, the Sunna and especially authoritative ḥadīths indicate that the authors were well-read in traditional texts and were capable of religious, if not theological, interpretations to articulate their political goals. This aspect of the *Seven Letters* is clear and must be evaluated on its own merits.

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[41] Ibid., pp. 188-90.

[42] Dietl, *Holy War*, p. 216; Dietl further states that the pamphlets were first published by the Ṭalīʿa Press in Kuwait; James Buchan asserts that Ibn Junayd "sold a property in Jiddah to cover the cost of the weapons," futher establishing a link with al-ʿUtaybī. Although the bulk of the weapons came from National Guard arsenals, Ibn Junayd was probably active in the movement, see Holden and Johns, *The House of Saud*, p. 521.

[43] Born in 1936, Juhaymān joined the Saudi National Guard in 1955 when he was 19 years old. He served 18 years in the Guard and resigned sometime around the end of 1973 to attend the Islamic University at Madīna. It is not clear whether his resignation was intentional or encouraged; see *Intifāḍat al-Ḥaram*, pp. 35-39, and Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, pp. 141-42.

The Political Message

A summary of Juhaymān's political message was delivered by one of his followers over the public loudspeaker system during the Grand Mosque takeover. Its five main points were:

1-The adoption of socio-cultural values which are based on just Islamic values rather than corrupt Western emulations, and the breaking of diplomatic relations with Western states which are exploitative in nature.

2-The overthrow of the "treacherous" Āl Saʿūd monarchy and the establishment of a just Islamic government, as well as full accountability of the Āl Saʿūd's wealth, stolen from the Saudi people.

3-The declaration that King Khālid and his co-rulers [read the ulama and the ruling family] who governed with divine guidance, are unjust and sinful because they encouraged foreign exploitation of the country.

4-The end of petroleum exports to the United States because of its rejection of Islam and of Muslims; the national wealth should not be squandered and petroleum exports should be limited only to meet the country's economic needs.

5-The expulsion of all foreign civilian and military experts who are dominating the Arabian Peninsula.[44]

In contrast to these fairly clear political objectives (not necessarily shared by the majority of the Saudi population), Juhaymān's religious views remained elusive to bewildered pilgrims and government authorities, caught in the whirlwind of the Makka uprising. A discussion of Juhaymān's perceptions of legitimacy, and his theological views concerning the Mahdī, reveal their connection between legitimacy and theology based on a carefully thought-out notion of bayʿa.

Political Legitimacy

Al-ʿUtaybī belonged firmly to the Ikhwān tradition. His preachings concerning the legitimacy of the Āl Saʿūd and the appearance of the expected Mahdī reveal that his chief concern was with the ruling elite's political legitimacy. Letter 1 reiterates this point time and again, reminding the reader that there are two classes of rulers in the Muslim world. On the one hand there is the ruler who *follows* the Qur'ān and the Sunna; on the other, there is the ruler who imposes his will on his subjects. Says al-ʿUtaybī (in agreement with classical Sunni political theory):

All Muslims are living under imposed rulers who do not uphold the reli-

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[44] *Intifāḍat al-Ḥaram*, p. 49; these themes are also discussed in Abū Dharr, *Thawra fī Riḥāb Makka* (London?: Dār Ṣawt al-Ṭalīʿa, 1980). The choice of the pseudonym Abū Dharr for the author or authors of this publication is particularly interesting since it is intended to convey a high degree of legitimacy to the Makka uprising. Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, a companion (*ṣaḥābī*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, represented the non-conformist prototype and model of piety. Supporters of ʿAlī regarded Abū Dharr in a saintly manner because he warned Muslims against the perceived secularization of Islamic polity and suffered persecution from the Caliph for doing so. For more details on Abū Dharr see, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Jawdah al-Saḥḥār, *Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī: Al-Ishtirāqī al-Zāhid* (Cairo: 1966); Ṣalāh, ʿAzzam, *Shahīd al-Kalima: Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī* (Cairo: 1966); A.J. Cameron, *Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī: An Examination of his Image in the Hagiography of Islam* (London: Luzac and Company Ltd., for the Royal Asiatic Society, 1973), especially pp. 62–119; and ʿIzz al-Din Ismāʿīl, *Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī* (Beirut: 1974); Cameron reports "that there are Muslims in Persia who trace their descent from Abū Dharr . . . and that there recently existed for some years in Tehran an Abū Dharr club," (p. 33).

> gion. We owe obedience only to those who lead by God's book. Those who lead the Muslims with differing laws and systems and who only take from religion what suits them have no claim on our obedience and their mandate to rule is nil.[45]

But beyond this general principle, which applies to all Muslim rulers, al-ʿUtaybī turns his attention to the House of Āl Saʿūd specifically. For the young iconoclast, all of Saudi Arabia's troubles began when the Arabian Peninsula's tribes accepted ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Saʿūd who, from the Ikhwān's perspective, opposed the jihād against the Turks and in the process betrayed the Sharīf Ḥusayn in the Hijāz.[46] Al-ʿUtaybī's words about the royal household are explicit. The following passage gives a flavor:

> Ever since the rule of King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz has settled down in the Peninsula, you find that people have become ignorant of the ways of Islam. Those with poor insight and awareness see some good in the Islamic rule, but they fail to see what it hides in the way of suspending the struggle for Islam [jihād], in the alliance with Christians and in the pursuit of worldly things. Our belief is that the continued rule [of these leaders] is a destruction of God's religion even if they pretend to uphold Islam. We ask God to relieve us of them all.[47]

These are powerful words. The best the House of Saʿūd can offer the Saudi population is material goods, they say, and little in the way of spiritual guidance. But there is more in this passage. It hints at the ruling elite's deception of the Saudi people by entering into alliances with non-Muslims and by pursuing worldly things. In effect, al-ʿUtaybī is rejecting the "progress" that even he must have witnessed in the Kingdom throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Does al-ʿUtaybī's admonishment of the ruling elite have less to do with worldly things than the "deception" of power hinted at above? Another passage gives an explanation:

> The best and most obvious example [of the deception of the ruling elite] is the founder of their state, King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and the tribal elders who share his power, who are in agreement and in support of his policies or are silent about his wrongdoings. He called upon the Ikhwān, may God rest their souls, to support him on the basis of the Holy Qur'ān and the tenets of the religion as the Imām of all Muslims. They fought for him, spread the faith and opened the country for him. But as soon as his power was established and as soon as he secured what he wanted, he allied himself with the Christians [the British and Americans] and stopped the jihād outside the Peninsula.[48]

In addition to disassociating himself from the Saudi ruling elite, the author is careful to identify the betrayal felt by his ancestors and the treachery of the king in allying his forces with foreign colonial forces against the Ḥijāz revolt. More importantly, there is a hint of praise for the Ikhwān. It suggests that fairer treatment of the warriors might have "legitimized" the king's rule.

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[45] Al-ʿUtaybī, First Letter (Group One) in Aḥmad, *Rasāʾil*, p. 71.
[46] Habib, *The Saudi Warriors*, pp. 25–30.
[47] Al-ʿUtaybī, First Letter (Group One) in Aḥmad, *Rasāʾil*, p. 88.
[48] Al-ʿUtaybī, First Letter (Group One) in Aḥmad, *Rasāʾil*, p. 89.

This theme of the exclusion of the Ikhwān from the emerging power structure on the Arabian Peninsula seems to preoccupy the young al-ʿUtaybī. References to the Ikhwān abound throughout his seven letters. The ruling elite on the other hand, according to al-ʿUtaybī, have excluded the defenders of the true faith from the power base of the country, and they can only remain in power by protecting their respective "domains." In this sense, the alliance between the al-Shaykh family and the Āl Saʿūd dynasty recognized the emerging balance of power. Unfortunately, according to al-ʿUtaybī, the ruling elite failed to uphold the faith and embarked on a roller-coaster of corruption. For the author of the *Seven Letters*, the royal family and the leading ulama are corrupt. Both worship money and spend it frivolously on gigantic palaces, not mosques (the Saudi royal family has in fact financed the construction of literally thousands of mosques throughout the world). And al-ʿUtaybī warns that unless a Saudi accepts the ruling elite's political-religious wisdom, he can be persecuted and even tortured. Al-ʿUtaybī acknowledges that a Saudi who plays along with the regime is rewarded by the same ruling elite that is condemned for wasting the country's resources in the name of religion. Says al-ʿUtaybī:

> Anyone with eyesight can see today how they represent religion as a form of humiliation, insult and mockery. These rulers have subjected Muslims to their interests and made religion into a way of acquiring their materialistic interests. They have brought upon the Muslims all evil and corruption.[49]

And although several ulama have warned the royal family about its corruption, al-ʿUtaybī suggests al-Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Bāz, the blind theologian and Chairman of the Supreme Religious Council (Iftā'), is in the pay of the Āl Saʿūd and has endorsed their corrupt ways. In fact, Ibn Bāz has had his share of disagreements with the royal family, especially when King Fayṣal was introducing many technical innovations (e.g., when Ibn Bāz opposed technical advances by writing that the earth was flat). The theologian's approach is to maintain an open door and be amicable to all sides. Yet, most of the religiously motivated students attending his lectures in Madina arrived at the conclusion that Ibn Bāz was not an independent scholar and therefore could no longer be trusted. Al-ʿUtaybī writes that he and his friends were initially impressed by Ibn Bāz but that they could not reconcile the theologian's accommodation of the royal family.[50] In his words: "Ibn Bāz may know his Sunna well enough, but he uses it to bolster corrupt rulers."[51]

Ibn Bāz and other religious figures are castigated throughout all the letters as agents of a corrupt regime, using religious authorities to bolster illegitimate rule. Ironically, the blind theologian had questioned al-ʿUtaybī and several of his followers in June 1978, when the security forces suspected foul play. At the time, the Chairman of the Supreme Religious Council had determined that the young "students" were harmless and should be released.[52] Al-ʿUtaybī must have learned a great deal from this experience since all of his criticisms of Ibn Bāz and the ulama (probably written after 1978) are framed in religious terminology based on authentic precedents. Frequent citations from the authoritative tradition collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dawūd, and Ibn Māja, and from the theologian Ibn

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[49] Al-ʿUtaybī, First Letter (Group One) in Aḥmad, *Rasā'il*, p. 67.

[50] Al-ʿUtaybī, First Letter (Group One) in Aḥmad, *Rasā'il*, pp. 82–83, and passim.

[51] Al-ʿUtaybī, Third Letter (Group One) in Aḥmad, *Rasā'il*, p. 160.

[52] Abū Dharr, *Thawra*, pp. 250–52.

Taymiyya and even ʿAbd al-Wahhāb indicate that al-ʿUtaybī was not opposed to Saudi Arabia's religious traditions (Ḥanbalī-Tawḥid). Rather, they suggest that his campaign was political in nature, targeted primarily aganst the Āl Saʿūd.

The Mahdī

A rather puzzling feature of these letters is the discussion of the mahdī. Although the term mahdī does not occur in the Qur'ān, the identity of the mahdī is known (though he is in concealment) within the Shiʿa community, whereas no one knows his identity among Sunni Muslims. Why did al-ʿUtaybī and his followers appeal to the mahdī in the cradle of *muwaḥḥidūn* Islam? Al-ʿUtaybī devotes an entire letter to the mahdī in his studies. In *al-Fitan wa Akhbār al-Mahdī*, al-ʿUtaybī presents an important exegesis on the mahdī which adds to the rich literature.[53] This is quite novel for the muwaḥḥidūn environment because Ḥanbalī-Tawḥīd traditions do not refer to the concept of *al-muhtadī* (rightly guided one). Thus, the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia has insisted that al-ʿUtaybī was not qualified to interpret the law and that al-Qaḥṭānī's claim to be the mahdī was preposterous. Moreover, attention to the rebels' religious claims played into the hands of the authorities, who "sanitized" the anti-Saʿūd criticisms broadcast on the Kaʿba's public system. Saudi authorities went out of their way to convince the public that al-Qaḥṭānī was in fact an impostor. Rumors circulated on his tribal background, nationality, and theological training. Even his death was mired in controversy. Some reports alleged that he was killed by al-ʿUtaybī, while others claimed that he was not dead after all.[54] Opposition forces asserted that the so-called "mahdī debate" in 1979 was the figment of the Saudi government's imagination.[55]

No matter how confusing these questions are, it is possible to clarify a few points. First, the leader of the 1979 uprising was Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī, not Muḥammad al-Qaḥṭānī. Second, of the thousands of pilgrims present in the Kaʿba on 20 November 1979, no one heard al-Qaḥṭānī, or anyone else for that matter, claim that the long awaited mahdī had arrived, and no one was chanting "The Mahdī is here, The Mahdī is here." Rather pilgrims reported hearing "Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar" by the rebellious throng.[56] Third, no matter how convoluted the debate on the mahdī was, only one authoritative source referred to it: al-ʿUtaybī's First Letter. Ironically, the letter makes no theological breakthroughs in what is one of the most carefully analyzed subjects in Islam, among both the Sunnis and the Shiʿa.[57] What the text does is to carefully summarize earlier interpretations to rekindle interest in the subject. Ultimately, the purpose of such an exegesis is (1) to "correct" the *taqlīd* (conformism/blind imitation) of Saudi ulama regarding their "incorrect" teachings, and establish a puritanical community based on pristine Islam and, (2) to appeal to the legendary concept held by Sunni masses outside of the Arabian Peninsula.

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[53] Abdulaziz Abdulḥussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shiʿism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); see also Douglas S. Crow, "Islamic Messianism," *Encyclopedia of Religion* IX (New York: MacMillan Press), 477–81.

[54] Abū Dharr, *Thawra*, pp. 86–87.

[55] Ibid., p. 80.

[56] Ibid., pp. 80–81, 83.

[57] Al-ʿUtaybī, First Letter (Group Two) in Aḥmad, *Rasāʾil*, pp. 201–42; and Al-ʿUtaybī [Printed Manuscript], *Rasāʾil*, pp. 3–31.

Conclusion

As Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nāyif repeated constantly in 1979 and 1980, Juhaymān al-ʿUtaybī and his followers represented an "extremely limited" number of religious dissenters. But the fact that this opposition occurred at all in Saudi Arabia, where legitimacy is based on religion, indicates that religious opposition to the throne has not been eliminated even after 47 years of rule. To a large extent, the necessity of keeping borders open to millions of pilgrims sustains the opposition. Contacts between Muslim underground religious movements are facilitated by this free access to Makka, where socio-political frustrations are freely vented under the full protection of religious traditions. It is remarkable, for example, that Egyptian President Sadat's assassin, Khālid Aḥmad al-Isṭambūlī, had a copy of the *Seven Letters*, which was passed on to him by his brother Muḥammad, who happened to be in Makka in December 1979.[58] For obvious reasons, the ruling elite cannot severely curtail access to Makka for millions of pilgrims, even though an attempt has recently been made to precisely do that.[59]

Al-ʿUtaybī's call was only partially directed at the Saʿūd royal family's religious credentials. As a reading of the *Seven Letters* indicates, while encouraging economic and even social development throughout the 1970s, the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia proved unwilling to initiate the kinds of political reforms that al-ʿUtaybī and his brethren sought. The building of mosques and generous financial support to religious figures were not perceived by extremists to be sufficient moves to bolster the Āl Saʿūd's tainted credentials. Al-ʿUtaybī and his brethren wanted to "emulate the Prophet's example – revelation, propagation, and military takeover," "to overthrow their present corrupt rulers," and "to establish a puritanical Islamic community which protects Islam from unbelievers and does not court foreigners."[60] Against such demands, King Fahd's recent decision to change his title from "Majesty" to the "Custodian of the Two Holy Places"[61] may placate some purists, but it remains to be determined whether the ruling elite can protect its power base without promoting major political reforms. And these will have to take into account the power base of the "new Ikhwān." That, in the end, is what al-ʿUtaybī was seeking, because his avenue for solace was not in *ijtihād* but in *hidāya* (guidance).

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[58] Mohamed Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat* (New York: Random House, 1983), p. 247.

[59] On 26 April 1988, Saudi Arabia broke diplomatic relations with Iran, *in part* to curtail the number of Iranian pilgrims expected to reach 150,000. The Saudis did not want a replay of the 31 July 1987 demonstrations in Makka which resulted in over 400 people killed. Instead, Riyāḍ announced that 45,000 Iranian pilgrims would be granted ḥajj visas, which Teheran promptly rejected. Rather than acquiesce to this Saudi condition, Iran boycotted the 1988 pilgrimage, see "Saudi Arabia and Iran: Towards High Noon at Mecca," *The Economist*, (30 April 1988), 41.

[60] "Aḥdāth al-Ḥaram Bayn al-Haqāʾiq wa al-Abāṭīl," *Ṣawt al-Talīʿa* (May 1980), pp. 120–22, as cited in Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, p. 142.

[61] "Fidei Defensor," *The Economist*, (8 November 1986), 49.